GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
COAL
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:2756
ANSWERED ON:19.03.2008
FIRE IN ABANDONED COAL MINES
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Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state:

(a) whether fire broke out recently in the mines which had been abandoned since 1975 and where illegal mining was being carried out in the Ram`ganj coal belt in West Bengal;

(b) if so, the details thereof alongwith the list of all the abandoned mines in the area;

(c) whether the Government has inspected these abandoned coal mines during the. last three years;

(d) if so, the details thereof alongwith the names of inspected coal mines; and

(e) the action taken by the Government to stop the illegal mining/subsidence and fire in the coal mines alongwith the safety of workers?

Answer

MINISTER OF THE STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COAL (DR.DASARI NARAYANA RAO)

(a): Yes, Sir. Due to illegal mining, fire at two locations under Satgram Area in West Bengal viz. Benalee (East Satgram abandoned since pre-nationalisation) in privately owned land (does not belong to Eastern Coalfields Limited) and J.K. Nagar Fire Project (near Nimcha Village) had occurred and was dealt suitably by Eastern Coalfields Limited and State Government immediately with State Police and Administration support.

(b): A fire had broken out on 31.12.07 at Benalee, which has been successfully dealt by Eastern Coalfields Limited (ECL) and State Government Authority by dozing and filling up of all the pits immediately without any damage or loss of life. The fire had taken place in some illegal pits, which were unscientifically dug in the outcrop side and where there was no working of ECL. The coal, which was left as barrier as required by Coal Mines Regulation 1957,against a jore was being illegally mined by miscreants. ECL is having underground rights to extract coal but the surface land in which the illegal pits were dug are all private lands and thus the owners of the land had allowed the miscreants to dig the pits and to mine the coal.

To save Nimcha village, as advised by Directorate General of Mine Safety(DGMS),a trench/ query is being cut in the outcrop side of Nega seam to isolate the village from fire located on the dip side of the workings. On 04.01.08, a pothole measuring about 10 meters occurred near Nimcha village and smoke was seen coming out from the pot hole. This pot hole was created due to an unauthorized / illegal gallery driven from the edge of the quarry towards the village. Miscreants had driven many similar galleries, which were filled up by dozing.

A list of abandoned mines/production operation suspended within the leasehold of ECL since nationalization is enclosed as Armexure-A.

(c): The surface areas of the abandoned mines within the leasehold area are regularly inspected by the concerned colliery officials. When any illegal mining activity is detected, FIR is lodged with the local Police Station. These illegal pits/workings, which were filled/dozed in the past, have been re-dug by miscreants and this requires repeated filling/ dozing as and when required.

(d): All disused workings (which have not been sealed off) within the leasehold area are regularly and statutorily inspected by the colliery officials, at monthly intervals. A list of abandoned mines/production operation suspended within the leasehold of ECL since Nationalization is enclosed as Annexure-A.

(e): Following action is taken to stop illegal mining/subsidence and fire in the coal mines alongwith the safety of workers.

1) Central, State, District and Area Level meetings on illegal mining are regularly held.

2) ECL Authority has constituted committees at Area and Company level to inspect sites prone to illegal mining and constant vigil is maintained by the Area authorities and the respective Police Stations.

3) Moreover,Central Industrial Security Force(CISF) conducts meetings and surprise inspections with ECL Authorities on regular basis.

4) Dozing/ filling/sealing of illegal mining sites by pay-loaders dozers with security cover provided by State Police is done when illegal mining sites are identified. As the filled/sealed/dozed excavations are re-dug by miscreants, this activity has become a continuous process.

5) ECL Security, CISF & Police are conducting regular raids/checks and have seized illegal coal, coal loaded trucks and apprehended and handed over the miscreants to the Police and FIRs are also lodged.

6) When illegal mining activities outside leasehold are detected, State Administration is informed.